Region 9 News Release
San Francisco, CA

- **For Immediate Release: July 18, 2002**
- ***SAMPLING SHOWS LOW TRITIUM LEVELS AT LAWRENCE BERKELEY LAB***

Agency decides no further action necessary under Superfund program

SAN FRANCISCO The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced today that environmental sampling at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found tritium levels well below federal health standards, and is opting for no further action under the Superfund program.

The EPA analyzed dozens of "split samples" of air, water and soil that it compared with sample data from the lab. The results confirmed that the site does not present a health threat to those working and living in and around the facility. Today's announcement means that the EPA has changed the site's Superfund status from "potentially eligible" for listing to "no further federal response."

With the tritium labeling facility in the process of closing down, tritium air emissions are expected to decrease substantially during the course of this year. The EPA will continue to regulate air emissions from all sources at the lab including those from potential residual tritium contamination -- under the Clean Air Act. The California Department of Toxic Substances Control will oversee any future hazardous waste remediation needed at the facility.

"The good news is that sampling continues to show people living and working in and around the lab are not being exposed to harmful levels of tritium," said EPA Regional Administrator Wayne Nastri. "We have studied this issue extensively, and will continue to work with the Department of Energy and the state to monitor tritium-related activities at the lab under the Clean Air Act."

Air samples at the site have shown tritium levels at least 10 times below the national standard the EPA considers safe, and soil is more than 100 times below the standard. While the lab has detected tritium levels above the federal cleanup standard in one groundwater monitoring well that is situated immediately adjacent to the tritium facility, that water is not being used as a drinking water source and people do not come in contact with it. Most groundwater samples were below the standard.

As part of its Superfund closeout, the EPA is recommending that the lab work with local officials to institute a ban on any new drinking wells in the immediate area, as well as continue to meet with Berkeley officials and the community to update them on environmental issues at the site.

In 1999, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a department under the Centers for Disease Control, completed an extensive health consultation with people living and working around the site. Officials documented that rates of cancer, leukemia, and infertility in the area were no higher than the statewide average. The agency concluded that the site was not posing a health threat to people in the area.

The EPA began looking into tritium contamination at the Lawrence Berkeley Lab in 1997 at the request of the former Congressman Ron Dellums, the city of Berkeley and Committee to Minimize Toxic Waste, a Berkeley community group.

For the past 19 years, the lab's National Tritium Labeling Facility has tagged compounds with tritium for use in chemical and biochemical reactions. Until last December, when it ceased operations, the facility emitted small amounts of tritium to the air through a stack. These emissions continue to meet health standards established under the Clean Air Act.

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Contents | Next | Previous | Region 9 | EPA Home